

MILTON'S CONCEPT OF HELL

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MILTON'S CONCEPT OF HELL

Satan, whether or not one considers him the hero of Paradise Lost, is a compelling figure in the epic nevertheless. It is not surprising then that this creation of Milton has been the subject of a great deal of literary scholarship. What is surprising is that Satan's kingdom, the Hell of the poem, has been the subject of so little. The majority of the scholarship in this area has been limited to source studies, dealing particularly with parallels in the works of the Ancients. There are a few studies which have dealt with more modern presentations of Hell and their relation to Milton, but these tend to be limited in scope to verbal reminiscences found in certain sets of lines.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what Milton's concept of Hell is, as this concept is realized in Paradise Lost. The emphasis then will first be on the material elements of the place as they are established and embodied in the images of the poem, and secondly on the dramatic possibilities that flow from such a place and that are limited by it. The general approach will be directed, not toward an extensive explication of each of the elements of Milton's Hell, but rather toward an attempt to see the totality of the conception, the spirit of the place as conceived in his poetry. Some speculation about Milton's theological position will of course be necessary, but again only as such material is firmly rooted in, and pertinent to, the kind of public poem that Milton has written. What Milton's personal beliefs about Hell were--whether he actually believed in its existence, or whether,

which is more likely, his ideas about Hell underwent gradual change--probably cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty. In any event, such discussions are beyond the scope of this paper.

Perhaps one reason for the relatively limited amount of critical discussion of Milton's Hell is the assumption that there is some kind of traditional concept that is capable of only minor alteration in any given presentation, if the presentation is to be accepted as successful. Such a position is obviously the basis of Dr. Johnson's pronouncement about Milton's literary creation:

...in the description of heaven and hell we are surely interested, as we are all to reside hereafter either in the regions of horror or of bliss.

But these truths are too important to be new; they have been taught to our infancy; they have mingled with our solitary thoughts and familiar conversation, and are habitually interwoven with the whole texture of life. Being therefore not new, they raise no unaccustomed emotion in the mind; what we knew before, we cannot learn; what is not unexpected, cannot surprise.¹

Before it can be ascertained whether Dr. Johnson's judgment is accurate, it will be necessary to look in some detail at the various traditions that make up the history of the Otherworld to see if there is a traditional concept of Hell. The findings of such a survey, a survey limited generally to literature, but with at least an occasional notice of other pertinent materials as folklore and the pictorial arts, ought to make possible a more meaningful judgment of the spirit of Milton's Hell as presented in Paradise Lost.

¹Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (London, 1961), Vol. I, p. 126.

I

Many of the legends of the Otherworld are of great antiquity and may be traced back along several widely divergent lines. The principal categories may be conveniently classified as Classical, Eastern,² Christian, and Celtic. Although other modes of classification are possible, for the purposes of this paper "Christian" denotes that tradition resulting from the fusion in the early Christian Church of the Hellenic and Oriental schools of thought with the concepts derived from the New Testament; furthermore, the Celtic tradition does not so much represent entirely independent forms of the legend, as it does a new departure whereby the Christian tradition, transplanted to Ireland, comes into contact with certain cognate ideas which were prominent in the native mythology and literature and, acquiring a fresh development, thus reappears in several forms in the Middle Ages.³

Milton knew all four of these traditions of the Otherworld. He certainly knew the Classical and the Christian extensively; he knew the Eastern, at least indirectly through the Old Testament, and the

²I have been unable to find much material dealing with the Eastern tradition of the Otherworld. It is generally accepted that this tradition had a good deal of influence on the Jewish writers immediately preceding the Christian era, especially through the Hellenistic schools of Asia where the more prominent features of the Oriental dogmas were combined with Greek and Roman thought. Generally the features of Hell found in Eastern presentations are much the same as those to be found in the Classical presentations: see William R. Alger's The Destiny of the Soul (New York, 1878), pp. 205-217; 244-264.

³I am indebted for much of this material, particularly in terms of general outline and bibliographical help, to Howard R. Patch's The Other World (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950); other useful discussions are: William R. Alger, The Destiny of the Soul; H.R. Ellis, The Road to Hell; J.A. MacCulloch, The Harrowing of Hell.

Celtic again at least indirectly, through its "Christianized" form preserved in the oral tradition that probably continued to be sucked with the mother's milk long after Protestantism began changing what Christianity was for an Englishman. In the discussion to follow, the authors and accounts chosen to represent the respective traditions are not thereby suggested as distinct sources for Milton's conception of Hell, though several obviously are. Within the development of each of the traditions, there has been a remarkable unanimity in the spirit of the conception and very often in the manner of execution, frequently to the point of repetition of specific elements. Thus it is possible to discuss meaningfully each of the traditions through one or several carefully chosen examples.

The Classical versions of the Otherworld legends were preserved in the Middle Ages chiefly through the sixth book of Virgil's Aeneid, which relates the visit of Aeneas to Hades; but this episode was itself suggested by the similar adventure of Odysseus, told in the eleventh book of the Odyssey. The fundamental conception, a visit paid to the Otherworld by a living man, appears in many of the Greek myths; a common attribute of these early descriptions of the Otherworld, probably because of their spontaneous growth, is that they are not composed to be the vehicles of instruction or edification. The few examples which they give of penalties attached to guilt are rather instances of the private vengeance of Zeus upon those who have rebelled against him or who have outraged some member of his divine family. In these accounts the abode of the departed appears as a dreamy region, where they lead a

shadowy and undesirable existence;⁴ and although, side by side with this conception, another theory subsisted assigning to the happy dead a serene existence in the Elysian plain, still this belief did not go beyond the vague notion of a bright and happy region of perpetual calm where death and care were unknown.⁵ The Greek poets, from Homer on, contain innumerable references to this Elysium, but although we sometimes find a hint that these joys are reserved for those who have merited them by a righteous life, still we find no movement toward a systematized eschatology.

By the time of Plato, however, the legends have become a vehicle of religious instruction. In the tenth book of his Republic⁶ Plato records the narrative of one Er, the son of Armenius, concerning his experiences in the world of the spirits. Er had been killed in battle and brought away with the rest of the slain, but was later restored to life. His soul, upon issuing from the body, had been conveyed to a certain spiritual place where there were two openings leading down below the earth, and two others leading up into heaven. Between these openings judges were stationed who sent the souls of the righteous to heaven by the upper and right-hand way and the wicked downward by the left-hand path. The judges commanded Er to see and hear all that passed so that he might become a messenger to mankind. The souls of

⁴Homer, The Odyssey, trans. S.H. Butcher and A. Lang (New York, 1950), pp. 166-180.

⁵Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁶The Republic, trans. Francis M. Cornford (New York, 1956), pp. 350-359.

the departed after a thousand years returned by the second openings from the celestial and subterranean regions. The return of the one company was marked by joy and gladness, because of the delights they had tasted and the spectacles of beauty through which they had passed; they then entered for a while into a peaceful meadow, there to converse with others of the just. The other company appeared all parched and dusty from their journey, weeping and dismayed at the remembrance of all they had seen and suffered, for in the Underworld each sinner received tenfold for the crimes he had committed. Further, those guilty of enormous crimes lost their return entirely; these were dragged back by wild-looking, fire-scathed men, fettered hand and foot, beaten down and flayed and finally cast down into Tartarus, that place of punishment for the wicked located by Homer far below Hades. With the exception of this last and worst class of criminals the punishments were but of temporary duration.

Four centuries later, Plutarch takes up the tale. His work "On the Delays of the Divine Vegeance"⁷ describes the vision of Soleus, a vision similar in character to that of Plato's Er, but in many of its circumstances approximating far more closely the Christian visions. Soleus had led a life of extreme wickedness. Beginning to appreciate his condition, he sent to the oracle of Amphilochus to inquire whether the remainder of his life would be better than the earlier part. The oracle replied that it would be better after his death. Some time after this, because of an accident, he was taken for

⁷Moralia, trans. Philip De Lacy and Benedict Einarson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959), Vol. VII, pp. 118-123.

dead; but three days later, as he was being lowered into the grave, he sat up. He soon became renowned for his virtue; he explained the reason for this conversion by the story of his experiences during his temporary "death". With a kinsman who had died young as his guide, he had learned that there is a diversity in the treatment of departed spirits. Adrasteia, daughter of Zeus and Necessity, is charged with the general superintendence of the punishments for the guilty. Because guilt is of various degrees, Adrasteia commits the punishment of offences to three Furies. The first of these, Poine, is the minister of temporal penalties by which lesser sinners are purged of their guilt by their sufferings in this life. Those whose guilt is not to be purged so easily are delivered over after death to Dike (avenging Justice) to be punished, while the absolutely incurable are abandoned to Erinyes who pursues them in hopeless flight through innumerable torments and then plunges them into an abyss of unspeakable horror. The souls for which Dike is responsible are first exposed naked to the gaze of their kin; if the kin were virtuous, the guilty soul is stricken with greater shame and if the kin too are wicked, then the remorse is augmented by the sight of one another's disgrace. Dike then inflicts a kind of punishment which leaves upon the soul scars which correspond to the gravity of the offences, but which gradually disappear as the soul recovers. After this discussion, Soleus, led by his kinsman, actually visited the place of punishment and was made to observe the torments of the wicked. In the listing of the punishments, it is obvious that each is designed to fit the crime. For instance, there are three lakes--one of molten gold, one of lead, exceedingly cold, and one of iron. Demons armed with tongs plunge the souls of the avaricious into

the lake of molten gold until they are heated, then into the leaden lake until they have constricted, and finally into the iron lake where they were broken to pieces. Then they are reintegrated to begin the punishment again.

Plutarch's eschatology shows more system than is to be found in his ancestors, or even to be found in many of the Christian visions. The intention to make the punishment fit the crime is a real development in the history of the Otherworld and in this respect reminds one of Dante's Hell.

Virgil,⁸ steeped as he was in the culture of Greece, tended to adopt and refine the elements of the Otherworld he found in the tradition of which Homer and Plato have been our representatives. Although earlier than Plutarch's by more than a century, his eschatology in general and his descriptions in particular are far more conservative, probably because the Otherworld legend is not introduced with any didactic purpose, but rather, as in Homer's epic, merely forms a part of the general machinery of the poem. His eclectic method is evident in his fusion of a general conception based on a form of Platonism⁹ with a catalogue of particulars--punishments and sins--drawn from Homer.¹⁰ Virgil's eclectic manner of dealing with the Otherworld

⁸Works (The Aeneid, Eclogues and Georgics), trans. J.W. Mackail (New York, 1950), pp. 118-123.

⁹Ibid., Bk. VI, lines 720-730.

¹⁰Ibid., Bk. VI, lines 570-621.

legends and his conservatism, particularly in the selection of elements to incorporate in his descriptions of Tartarus, bring us as close as we have yet come to a Hell that approaches Milton's, in its spirit at least. Further, it should be remembered that Virgil's description of Elysium appears immediately after that of Tartarus:

Here an ampler air clothes the meadows in lustrous sheen,
and they know their own sun and a starlight of their own.
Some exercise their limbs in tournament on the greensward,
contend in games, and wrestle on the yellow sand. Some
dance with beating footfall and lips that sing; with them
is the Thracian priest in sweeping robe, and makes music
to their measures with the notes' sevenfold interval, the
notes struck now with his fingers, now with his ivory rod....
Afar he [Aeneas] marvels at the armour and chariots empty
of their lords: their spears stand fixed in the ground,
and their unyoked horses pasture at large over the plain:
their life's delight in chariot and armour, their care in
pasturing their sleek horses, follows them in like wise to
their place under earth.¹¹

Though the atmosphere is different, one cannot but recall the recreation of the devils in Paradise Lost, after the Council has been adjourned and Satan has begun his journey.

The Christian tradition regarding the Otherworld to a certain extent grew out of the Eastern tradition, particularly its Hellenistic amalgam in Asia.¹² The spread of Christianity, which of its very nature kept men's thoughts bent upon the contemplation of the future

¹¹Ibid., Bk. VI, lines 632-655.

¹²The Book of Enoch, probably written in the second century B.C., is representative of this tradition. It relates in some detail how Enoch was raised up to Heaven where he was taken in charge by the Archangel Michael who revealed Heaven and Hell to him. The work pays attention to topographical detail in its descriptions of Hell: the infernal regions are swept by whirlwinds and traversed by rivers of fire, in which sinners are immersed. But generally the features of Hell are those which have already been found in the Classical tradition.

life, was naturally attended by an increased production of works descriptive of the Otherworld and man's lot there. Yet no very great contributions to the subject are made by the Canonical Scriptures, which give but little direct information concerning the future life. St. Jude refers to the rebellious angels who are "imprisoned in eternal darkness, to await their judgment when the great day comes."¹³ St. Peter¹⁴ speaks in general terms of the godless who will be punished by fire after the judgment. St. John's Apocalypse, oriented as it is toward the millennium, deals more with the tribulations coming upon the world, and with the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth in place of the old, than with the condition of individual souls after death, or the places of their eternal abode. And when this Revelation does treat of the Otherworld, it does so in terms much like those found in the later development of the Classical tradition:

Fire and brimstone shall be his [one who worships idols] torment, in the presence of the holy angels, in the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; day and night no rest is theirs, who worshipped the beast and his image...¹⁵

In the early centuries of the Christian era there was a general mingling of the various cultures introduced into the Empire because of its increased military and political sway. During this period of the rapid growth of Christianity, a great deal of propaganda was produced,

¹³"The Universal Epistle of the Blessed Apostle Jude," The Holy Bible, trans. Monsignor Ronald Knox (New York, 1956), p. 259.

¹⁴"The Second Epistle of the Blessed Apostle Peter," The Holy Bible, op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁵"The Apocalypse of the Blessed Apostle John," The Holy Bible, op. cit., p. 270.

and very often by people whose earlier roots were in one of these very different cultures. Many literary versions of visions of or visits to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise formed a great part of this propaganda. Many were perhaps based on genuine visions, but often they seem to have been borrowings from Pagan and Jewish sources.¹⁶ Canon J. A. MacCulloch summarizes this kind of cultural mingling:

This borrowing is most marked in the description of the divisions of Hades (found also in Egyptian, Oriental, and Jewish visions), and in the frequent mention of the narrow Bridge of the Dead, an early notice of which is found in Pope Gregory's Dialogues. The prototype of all these Christian visions is that in the Apocalypse of Peter (c. 100-150 A.D.), on which many later visions are based. Such stories, which, with wearisome iteration, tell how the seer or visitor or the soul of a dead person, revived by an apostle or saint, was led through the different regions, were popular in the Middle Ages, when men desired exact details of the Other World, and they were also used to enforce dogmatic teaching.¹⁷

The Apocalypse of St. Peter¹⁸ is noteworthy because it reflects a theory of retributive justice in the future life; the nature of the punishment is fitted to that of the crime. The pains of Hell are set forth with great minuteness, and Hell itself is presented in some detail as a place full of lakes of fire and burning mud. This and similar visions of the Otherworld originating during this period evidence the painting of a far more theologically systematic, picture of Hell with the colors of Jewish and Classical imagery. These latter elements are probably derived from a kind of popular faith resultant from the general fusion of the various cultures in

¹⁶Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 80-133.

¹⁷John A. MacCulloch, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

¹⁸Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 87-88; 127-130.

the Roman Empire. The elements common to both the early Christian vision and to the Greek Tartarus can be accounted for by such an indirect progression or they may be accounted for more directly as a transmission of Greek ideas through the Roman poets such as Virgil.

The Early Church Fathers, involved in defining and explaining doctrine in the face of various heresies, seem to have accepted the kind of popular hell--with its firm though rather indistinct features rooted in the Old and New Testament--that we have just reviewed in the Vision literature. In the midst of a lengthy and learned discussion of the various philosophical and theological questions that Hell raises, Augustine in the City of God interjects the following brief and rather general description:

...that hell, that lake of fire and brimstone, shall be real, and the fire corporal, burning both men and devils, the one in flesh and the other in air: the one in the body adherent to the spirit, and the other in spirit only adherent to the fire, and yet not infusing life, but feeling torment. For one fire shall torment both men and devils. Christ has spoken it.¹⁹

Even here the emphasis is on the speculative rather than the pictorial.²⁰

The Celtic tradition of the Otherworld, so-called in this paper for convenience of grouping, really includes versions from three different sources, two of which, Celtic mythology²¹ and Germanic mythology,²²

¹⁹The City of God, trans. John Healey (London, 1947), Vol. 2, p. 333.

²⁰See also Tertullian's Apology for the Christians trans. William Reeve, A.M. (London, [n.d.]), Chap. 47-48; he is more concerned with philosophical problems, such as how a spiritual soul can be punished by material fire, than he is with a specific presentation of the kind of place Hell is.

²¹Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 27-59.

²²Ibid., pp. 60-79.

can be discussed with some certainty. The third source is that strain of hybrids just discussed, the Christian tradition, which entered the Isles with Christianity and which had a great influence on the pagan ideas of the Otherworld.

The Otherworld as found in Celtic mythology has much in common with the Classical Otherworld; and even though some marked differences can be isolated, the majority of these are present in the descriptions of the home of the gods or in those presenting the earthly paradise. It is noteworthy that the place of the dead is milder than we have found in the other traditions; thus, for example, The Wooing of Emer²³ presents a place which is but an approximation of the gloomy Hades of the early Greeks. There is no mention of punishment, nor of flames. This Celtic myth, representative of those which treat of the Otherworld, centers more on the concept of the initiation-journey (in this case, Cuchulainn's) and the obstacles and perils faced. One general tendency common to the Celtic versions should be noted: there is often a mingling of the conceptions of the three Otherworld abodes. Allied to this for the purposes of this paper is the very common appearance of the sid, a marvelous underground palace, as the home of the gods.²⁴ This unusual feature bears resemblance to the Homeric Elysium in its description and looks forward in some ways to the home of the devils in Paradise Lost.

The Germanic contributions to the tradition of the Otherworld in the Isles seem to reinforce the Celtic, particularly in relation

²³Ibid., pp. 48-50.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 46-47.

to the Underworld. As in the Celtic accounts we often find a palace or castle as Elysium. And again we find an emphasis on the journey and the obstacles, rather than a dwelling on the nature of the place.

The account of King Hadding's journey given by Saxo in his Danish History is typical:

...she drew him with her underground, and vanished. I take it that the nether gods purposed that he should pay a visit in the flesh to the regions whither he must go when he died. So they first pierced through a certain dark misty cloud, and then advancing along a path that was worn away with long thoroughfaring, they beheld certain men wearing rich robes, and nobles clad in purple; these passed, they at last approached sunny regions which produced the herbs the woman had brought away. Going further, they came on a swift and tumbling river of leaden waters, whirling down on its rapid current divers sorts of missiles, and likewise made passable by a bridge. When they had crossed this, they beheld two armies encountering one another with might and main. And when Hadding inquired of the woman about their estate: "These," she said, "are they who, having been slain by the sword, declare the manner of their death by a continual rehearsal, and enact the deeds of their past life in a living spectacle."²⁵

This mildness of the Afterlife is present in most pre-Christian accounts; the lack of any didactic purpose probably accounts for this. The spread of Christianity gradually caused a change in the nature of the pagan myths, both Celtic and Germanic. As we saw in the Classical tradition, reproduction of a kind of vision, as in Homer, is transformed for theological purposes (in a loose sense) into an artistic creation, as in Plato and Plutarch. As Patch observes: "All these accounts [the later Germanic descriptions] include some suggestion of the darkness

²⁵Saxo Grammaticus, The Nine Books of the Danish History, trans. Oliver Elton, B.A. (London, 1905), Vol. 1, p. 119.

of the lower world, and, no doubt under Christian influence, the realm seems to have become rather undesirable or even positively horrible."²⁶

We find just such horror in a description of Hell in the Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History. This long eighth-century account presents a fully developed doctrine of purgatory, hell, paradise, and heaven. The quotation to follow is part of a narrative depicting a vision seen by Drithelm, who, in a trance, had visited the regions, and comes after a long description of purgatory which, in itself, exceeds in horror anything that we have yet encountered.

I saw the places before us suddenly lose their light and every corner full of darkness..... And as we went forward 'through the shadows beneath the solitary night,' behold, suddenly there appeared before us many round flaws [gusts] of grisly flames, ascending as it were out of a great pit and falling down again into the same.... I saw the tops of every flaw that ascended, full of men's spirits, which in manner of sparkles mounting up with the smoke were sometimes thrown a-high, sometimes, when the fumes of the fire were gone, fell back into the depths below. Moreover, an insufferable stench breaking out with the same fumes filled all the dark places about...suddenly I heard behind my back the sound of most dreadful and pitiful crying, and withal too a clatter of laughing, as it had been of the rude common folk insulting over their enemies brought in thralldom. Now when the same sound made brimmer and brimmer came fully up to me, I was aware of a crowd of evil sprites which did hale five human souls lamenting and wailing into the midst of that darkness, the evil sprites meantime laughing and triumphing.... And the evil sprites hailing them went down into the midst of that burning pit; and it came to pass that as they sank farther I could not make distinction between the crying of the men and the laughing of the devils, yet for all that had still a confused noise in my ears. In the mean season there came up from that gulf that vented flame certain dark sprites, and running up they compassed me about and with the glare of their eyes, and the foul-smelling fire they breathed both from mouth and nostrils, went to stifling me; they threatened also to seize me with the fiery tongs in their hands....²⁷

²⁶Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

²⁷Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, trans. J.E. King (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1954), Vol. II, pp. 257-259.

The similarities to the Classical Hades may indicate direct borrowing but the great contemporary interest in this subject makes another avenue seem as tenable. Patch comments:

Much of this wealth of description was not confined to what was written--that is to say, to the documents that have survived--but was floating in the medieval air of faith and credulity and artistic interest, and was transmitted by the channels of folktale and even popular rumor based on avid memory and long, long thoughts. Thus oriental culture, the religious life of Greece and Rome, the Jewish tradition, the Celtic and the Norse, could furnish details of the Other World even for writers who could hardly recognize their own indebtedness.²⁸

The sermon was a major influence in the lives of the great majority of the Christians in Medieval England. That a person of this period did not have to be able to read to have his conception of Hell formed according to the tradition we have just found Venerable Bede representative of--in other words that Patch's theory about an oral tradition is correct--is amply demonstrated when we find AElfric, a monk at Winchester,²⁹ preaching a sermon on Hell and not just adapting Bede, but rather quoting directly the passage we have just surveyed.³⁰ Collections of Aelfric's sermons contain others which present pictures of Hell; none of these pictures is as exhaustive as the Bede transmission and yet it is noteworthy that though they tend to quote lines from the Scriptures about Hell, still the general conception is closer in spirit to Bede's description. The details which are found in the following

²⁸Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

²⁹Albert C. Baugh (ed.), A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 101-102.

³⁰AElfric, The Sermones Catholici, trans. Benjamin Thorpe (London, 1844), Vol. II, pp. 349-357.

example and which have no basis in the Canonical Scriptures, help to create a Hell more useful for didactic purposes than the more general and unspecified picture presented by Christ and the Apostles.

The king said to his servants, "Bind the misclad hands and feet, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The hands and the feet which are not now bound through awe of God from perverse works, shall then, through the sternness of God's doom, be fast bound. The feet which will not visit the sick, and the hands which give nothing to the poor, shall then be bound in torment; because they are now wilfully bound from good works. The misclad was cast into outer darkness. The inner darkness is the blindness of the heart. The outer darkness is the swart night of eternal condemnation. The condemned will then by compulsion suffer in outer darkness, because he now wilfully passes his life in blindness of heart, and has no remembrance of the true light, that is, Christ, who said of himself, "I am the light of the world; he who followeth me goeth not in darkness, but hath the light of life." In the outer darkness shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. There the eyes shall weep in the hellish flame, which now libidiously roll about with unallowed desires; and the teeth, which now rejoice in gluttony, shall there grate in the unspeakable torments, which are prepared for the adversaries of God. Verily the eyes will smart with the powerful smoke, and the teeth quake with the great chill; for the reprobates shall suffer intolerable heat, and unspeakable chill. Verily the hellish fire has unspeakable heat and no light, but burns eternally in swart darkness.³¹

As we trace the conception of Hell through the Middle Ages we note the various elements becoming more Christianized, whether their origin be in the Celtic and Germanic mythology or in the more literary Classical tradition. And "to be Christianized" in the Middle Ages meant to be synthesized into the great scheme which explained everything in God's universe. In this scheme where nothing was neutral, Hell became the great negative teaching device, the nightmare of the child, the subconscious dread of the adult, and the terror

³¹Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 531-533.

of the dying. Thus the Celtic initiation-journey was allegorized into life's journey from birth through death into the appropriate place to collect one's just reward.³² The various kinds of monsters that had appeared imprisoned in the Hells of more than one tradition now become more active and, seemingly released from their Otherworld bonds, wander about the earth ready to swallow man up at any time, any day or hour--the ghostly hellmouth is born. The most noteworthy instance of this kind of "Christianizing" is the adaptation of the later Classical tendency to fit the punishment to the crime. As Christianity was more and more influenced by philosophy, particularly the Arabic interpretation of Aristotle, the doctrines of Christ and the Apostles began to be codified, systematized, and particularized. General conceptions of evil and sin were replaced with precisely defined categories, schemata which listed the sins according to their gravity and which judged objectively (that is, without regard to the individual person) the various grades of guilt. It is hardly a falsification (except of tone) to judge that when a Patristic genus gave birth to several Aristotelian species, the employment rate in Hell went up, particularly the demand for demons trained in specialized types of punishment.

The many extant representations of Hell found in the domain of the graphic arts give ample evidence of how effective this increasingly horrid conception was in forming the mind of the medieval man. The variety of woodcuts from this period range from the depiction of the flame-filled mouth of a grisly and unearthly monster (the hellmouth

³²Gerald R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge, 1933), pp. 56-109.

is the almost inevitable frame of any representation) to the complex picture with level upon level of highly particularized punishments awarded by a great variety of grotesque demons.³³ Sculptures above the entrances to churches and cathedrals show the same influence, that of this oral tradition; even when the sermon did not treat of the pains of Hell, the medieval man had vivid reminders before his eyes.³⁴ That this graphically horrid conception and presentation of Hell had not been limited to the unlearned, and further that it continued in time beyond the usually accepted limits of that historical abstraction, the Middle Ages, can be presumed when one finds El Greco filling the whole lower right-half of his "Allegory of the Holy League" (circa 1579) with a hideous hellmouth.³⁵

The Christian tradition of Hell, or perhaps better, the "Christianized" Hell in the sense of a highly systematized didactic vehicle, reached its culmination in Dante. As Prof. Patch notes: "Dante's Otherworld excursion is a complete view of the forms of such a journey available to him in medieval literature."³⁶ Though Dante rejected some of the elements of the contemporary descriptions--such as the open mouth of the dragon as symbolizing Hell--and thus moved slightly toward a more refined³⁷ conception, still he created a Hell that is

³³Paul Carus, The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil (Chicago, 1900), pp. 144, 164, 185, 388, 441.

³⁴Ibid., p. 181. This illustration of Hell-in-stone is typical of a good many such presentations in thirteenth and fourteenth century cathedrals.

³⁵Harold E. Wethey, El Greco and His School (Princeton, 1962), 165.

³⁶Howard R. Patch, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

³⁷"Refined" here is used in the sense that Virgil's presentation for example, demanded a similar subordination of lesser ends to a greater purpose, in artistic terms at least.

medieval in essence. Standing on the philosophical and theological shoulders of the Thomistic synthesis, Dante not only includes dissertations upon the medieval Queen of the sciences and her "Handmaid" but so exhausts the treatment of merited retribution that the term "Dantesque Hell" immediately brings to mind the suiting of the punishment to the sin.

The central artistic success of Dante's Hell is the creation of a microcosm in which historical and mythical characters hold intercourse, thus evoking a series of dramatic episodes in which the characters come alive. It is this that is Dante's addition to the tradition of Hell; Milton did not miss the value of the innovation.³⁸

The medieval concept of Hell is still very much alive at the time of the Reformation. Spenser's description in the first book of The Faerie Queen, though it is obviously enriched by direct Classical borrowings, still rests upon a basically medieval conception. It begins with a mention of the "yawning gulfe of deep Auernus hole./ ...darke and bace / With smoake and sulphure hiding all the place/" and proceeds thus:

And downe to Plutoes house are come bilue:
Which passing through, on euery side them stood
The trembling ghosts with sad amazed mood,
Chattring their yron teeth, and staring wide
With stonie eyes; and all the hellish brood
Of feends infernall flockt on euery side,
To gaze on earthly wight, that with the Night durst ride.

³⁸It is interesting to note that despite the similarity of Dante's and Milton's conception in regard to the effectiveness of dramatic action, still there is a great difference between the Satan of the medieval Catholic and that of the Renaissance Protestant. We find Dante's Lucifer permanently imprisoned in the lowest deep of his own dominion. He lies half embedded in ice or crouches silent and inactive, just as he may be supposed to have been since the time he was hurled from Heaven. There is no attempt, as in Paradise Lost, to vest him in garments of marred beauty.

They pas the bitter waues of Acheron,
 Where many soules sit wailing woefully,
 And come to fiery flood of Phlegeton,
 Whereas the damned ghosts in torments fry,
 And with sharpe shrilling shriekes doe bootlesse cry,
 Cursing high Ioue, the which them thither sent.
 The house of endlesse paine is built thereby,
 In which ten thousand sorts of punishment
 The cursed creatures doe eternally torment.³⁹

The "house of endlesse paine" is an interesting addition and probably indicates a natural development of the increasingly particular kind of Hell we have seen. The palace or armed castle of the Celtic tradition may have been an influence. And further, as the engines for punishment and their operators multiplied, a building to house them seems but one imaginative step away. Though Spenser does not enumerate the "ten thousand sorts of punishments," there seems to be enough evidence to suppose that the mere mention of this kind of idea would have been sufficient to evoke quite vivid memories of the torture rooms found presented in the graphic arts and preserved in the oral tradition.

It seems evident that the horror of hell in general and many of its medieval elements in particular were retained in the common conception of the place even after the split with Rome was finalised and Protestantism had amassed a considerable body of doctrine and interpretation about religious matters. "Of Hell," one of Jeremy Taylor's meditations on the "four last things," is certainly medieval in its horror:

³⁹Edmund Spenser, The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. J.C. Smith and E. DeSelincourt (London, 1963), p. 27.

Horrid darkness, sad and sore,
 And an eternal night,
 Groans and shrieks, and thousands more
 In the want of glorious light:
 Every corner hath a snake
 In the accursed lake:
 Seas of fire, beds of snow,
 Are the best delights below,
 A viper from the fire
 Is his hire
 That knows not moments from eternity.⁴⁰

The catalogue of punishments is not present, but this is not surprising, for the Protestant Reformation, in part, was a reaction against the legalistic attitude toward sin found in the Church of Rome. At least one contemporary of Milton was obviously affected by the medieval concept of Hell.

II

A comparison of Milton's concept of Hell, as determined from his presentation of it in Paradise Lost, with the Hells already surveyed suggests, as does even a conservative set of notes to the first two books, that Milton is quite eclectic in his choice of details and images. One basic reason for this eclecticism has already been hinted at--that the Biblical account of Hell hardly offers sufficient raw material for the creation of an epic.⁴¹ Yet this observation only

⁴⁰The Whole Works...of Jeremy Taylor, ed. Rt. Rev. Reginald Heber, D.D. (London, 1862), Vol. VII, pp. 656-657.

⁴¹See Theodore Howard Banks, Milton's Imagery (New York, 1950), pp. 193-194. Prof. Banks clearly analyzes Milton's attitude toward the Bible and its relation to other sources of knowledge; his conclusion is as follows:

...important as the Bible was to him, it did not by any means constitute the whole religion. Consequently we find images derived from various other aspects of the subject: orthodox (in Milton's eyes), heretical, and Catholic opinions, Judaism, paganism, and popular superstitions.

provides an excuse for eclecticism. Prof. Banks provides a more basic reason for Milton's individuality in this regard; after commenting on the great authority of the Bible in the seventeenth-century, he proceeds:

...in Milton's attitude toward Scripture we find a conspicuous difference between him and the others of his contemporaries who also devoted themselves in one way or another to the cause of religion. For them, the Bible was practically their only book; for him, the Bible was the book of paramount importance but by no means the only one. His love of literature took him far beyond the confines of religion, and the Bible is supplemented and enriched by the classics. He wrote as the last great exemplar of the Renaissance tradition of classical culture, modified by the moral earnestness of that tradition in England and by his own religious nature. The result is that we find a frequent juxtaposition or even fusion of pagan and Christian elements in his writing.⁴²

Implicit in Banks' judgment is an evaluation and an acceptance of Milton's own personal view of himself as a poet-seer whose duty it was to "assert Eternal Providence/ And justify the ways of God to men." I see no reason to reject this judgment, for it is based on a sound historical awareness of what the Protestant Reformation was about and it can be supported by ample biographical evidence to show that Milton was intellectually and emotionally convinced that Protestantism was Christianity. Paradise Lost has a didactic purpose, and in terms of this intention, the depiction of Hell fits into a pattern of development found in each of the traditions, the gradual tendency to utilize Otherworld myths and visions in the creation of a positive force to buttress a specific system of morality. In the Classical tradition, Plato's Myth of Er began this development and Plutarch's systematic treatment brought its pagan conclusion; in the Christian tradition, this kind of development began almost immediately

⁴²Ibid., pp. 201-202.

and clerics like Bede and AElfric moved the process toward a far more extensive fulfillment. Dante's Hell is the literary culmination of the medieval Christian tradition; it is also the most complete didactic vehicle of this subject, not only because it rests upon the exhaustive Thomistic synthesis, but further because it presents in graphic detail and representative example the kind of horror that was supposed to frighten men into Heaven. This horror, so remarkable in the medieval accounts, was achieved to a great extent by the inevitable catalogue of punishments that imaginative, though often ghoulish, minds had invented to match the ever-increasing number of defined sins. The fitting of the punishment to the crime had begun with Plutarch (the lake of molten gold for the avaricious) and again had found its culmination in Dante. Milton rejected the catalogue of punishments; whether he rejected the medieval horror and the Dantesque justice we shall investigate presently.

The comparison of Milton's Hell to Dante's or to any of its English brothers, raises an interesting question: how long did the medieval conception of Hell continue to influence men's minds? Prof. Patch's theory of an oral tradition has already been mentioned, but he suggests no terminus ad quem. Certainly Milton was familiar with some of the medieval representations found in the realm of the graphic arts, many of which still exist today. And just as certainly he knew Dante. But Milton's concept of Hell as an emotional fact was probably formed early in life, an experience that he shares with most Christian boys whether they lived in the early Middle Ages or are alive today; and, even if it would be possible to so date his reading as to conjecture, say, that he read Virgil before he read Dante, still a judgment

based upon this conjecture would probably miss the forming of the initial concept by a few years. It has been noted that the generation prior to Milton, as represented by Shakespeare and Spenser, seems to have been greatly influenced by the medieval concept of Hell, and further that at least one of his contemporaries, Jeremy Taylor, exhibits the effects of the same influence: to be specific, an inheritance of a didactic tool, the horror of which is quite graphic. Yet whether the oral tradition continued on up into Milton's time and, if so, just what elements were a part of this late tradition--both of these questions remain largely unanswerable. If the oral tradition did still exist beyond the period of religious transition, that is, beyond the reign of Elizabeth, and on into the period of theological solidification (at least in terms of basic issues) that led up to the Commonwealth, it seems probable that it lost a great many of the particular elements that it had inherited from the early Celtic and Germanic mythologies through the medieval visions and allegories, and thus that it tended to present Hell more as a generalized concept than as a place with some distinct topological features and where quite vivid punishments were inflicted on a great variety of specified sinners.

Milton's Hell in Paradise Lost then is the result of an eclectic process and its purpose was a didactic one; further, it may have been influenced by an oral tradition that earlier, at least, had been a mixture of all of the traditions about the Otherworld that we have considered. With these generalizations in mind, a brief survey of Milton's Hell as compared to the Hells of the four Traditions will prove informative. Milton makes use of some elements common to all

of the Traditions, such as the rivers of the Underworld, which are ultimately derived from the Classical, or the bridge to Hell, found so often in the Celtic presentations and ultimately attributable to the Eastern tradition. On the other hand, he rejects for obvious reasons the pagan notion (usually based on a philosophy embodying metempsychosis) of a limited stay in Hell, found in the early development of each of the traditions. The narrative frame of his presentation of Hell--the punishment of the fallen Angels--is rooted in the Bible, but neither the Scriptures nor the early Fathers provide much more material than this. In terms of this "frame" he rejects the almost universal device of the journey to the Otherworld, though it is possible to view Satan's journey from Hell as a satirical reversal of the initiation-journey much present in the medieval allegorical presentations. The rejection of the journey, and more significantly the rejection of the concomitant feature of such journeys, the guide, is quite in keeping with Milton's belief in the reality of the essential Protestant position; he is the poet-seer who calls upon the Holy Spirit to "instruct" and "illumine" where the Bible narrative is sketchy.⁴³ In terms of a topological frame, Milton rejects--as Dante before him--the ever-present medieval hellmouth, an element which he certainly knew from the many representations found in the graphic arts; in a

⁴³See Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660 (New York, 1952), p. 343. Prof. Bush comments thus on the philosophical and theological basis for this belief:

The meanings of 'reason' in seventeenth-century thought 'admit a wide solution', but for Whichcote, as for Taylor and Milton and others, reason signifies not the mere logical and critical faculty but the Platonic capacity for attaining divine truth, the whole unified personality of the well-disposed man.

sense, he replaces this active, ruthless, and revengeful monster who roamed the earth for his victims with an at least equally active, ruthless, and vengeful Satan--a substitution with more potential for literary treatment. Again, like Dante (and here the medieval poet is probably a source) he realizes the artistic possibilities of dramatic episodes and thus introduces lifelike characters into his Hell.

Yet, despite similarities between Dante's Hell and Milton's, even important ones like the major literary device, the use of dramatic episodes, that gives artistic life to each of the lower worlds, still there is a profound difference in spirit in the two places. The didactic, medieval horror of Dante's Hell is not reproduced by Milton. That he was aware of this central element and basic purpose of the medieval presentations cannot be doubted: he knew Dante, the culmination of the continental development, and he certainly was aware of Spenser's presentation,⁴⁴ if not of Shakespeare's

⁴⁴ Milton certainly knew Spenser's description of the Cave of Mammon:

The rowme was large and wide,
As it some Gyeld or solemne Temple weare:
Many great golden pillours did upbear
The massy rooffe, and riches huge sustayne....
(The Faerie Queene, II, 43.)

Spenser's description is not ostensibly of Hell, yet the Cave was "next adioyning" to the "gate of Hell" and Spenser adds: "ne them parted ought." The most interesting result of a comparison of Spenser's Cave with Milton's Hell is the realization that the two are close in spirit. In Dante and in the medieval presentations of Hell in general, Hell and the various punishments seem to exist only as vehicles or props, while Spenser's Cave and Milton's Hell, and Pandaemonium in particular, exist in their own right.

more disjointed picture.⁴⁵ Further, it can be argued that his concept of Hell may have been formed by contact with an oral tradition that still was oriented to the medieval concept. We have seen that a contemporary of his, Jeremy Taylor, shows the marks of such a conception. Yet Milton rejects this conception. This is not to say that a great many of the elements that we have found in the medieval presentations are not present in Milton's Hell; rather it is to contend that such elements do not form the heart of Milton's Hell, the essence of his concept. In fact, the reader's first view of Satan's new abode is certainly medieval. We find him "rolling in the fiery Gulf" as he contemplates the scene:

The dismal Situation waste and wilde,
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd....⁴⁶

But this description is only the backdrop of Milton's Hell--in a very real sense, it is the Christian cliché of Hell. And neither

⁴⁵Caroline F.E. Spurgeon in Shakespeare's Imagery (pp. 77-78) has brought together several examples to illustrate the Bard's concept. Though the examples are short and though no one of them purports to be an exhaustive presentation, yet enough of the medieval elements are present to place Shakespeare within this tradition, as Miss Spurgeon does. Her judgment, though, that "the torment of Hell as represented in the Middle Ages rarely takes the form of its being pictured as a very noisy place" seems a bit inaccurate.

⁴⁶Paradise Lost, ed. Frank Allen Patterson, et. al., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), Vol. II, Pt. I, ll. 60-69. Further quotations from Paradise Lost are from the Columbia Milton.

Milton the man, nor Milton the poet, was satisfied with this cliché.

Milton was a Puritan and thus the fire and brimstone kind of Hell that Satan initially becomes conscious of seems somehow vaguely what we would expect. Such a judgment is historically inaccurate. Perry Miller had commented to our purpose in his remarks about the seventeenth century Puritan tradition common to both England and America:

There is very little preaching of hell-fire in seventeenth-century [Puritan] sermons; Hooker's sentences are as far in that direction as any minister went before the beginning of the evangelical revival and the thunderings of Jonathan Edwards. So often are the first Puritans accused of living in fear and trembling under the threat of eternal torment that this point needs to be heavily underscored. That the ministers did not play upon their congregations' nerves by painting the horrors of the pit was because, for one thing no doubt, the sensibilities of people in the seventeenth century were inured to violence. This was still the age in which mothers took their children for a treat to public executions. In part the lack of brimstone sermons is accounted for by the Puritan disinclination to make religion emotional at the cost of judicious analysis and sound intellectual conviction.... But still more fundamentally, Puritan ministers did not bludgeon their people with the bloody club of damnation because their eyes were fixed upon the positive side of religion, upon the beauties of salvation, the glory of God, and the joy of faith. The worst they could imagine for the reprobate was not physical burnings and unslaked thirst, but the deprivation of God's spirit.⁴⁷

Yet we have surveyed one seventeenth century sermon and the Hell presented, though mild, was still medieval; we have seen Milton's initial picture--it too is medieval. But this is not Milton's Hell.

Another reason why Milton would not have been satisfied with the horrors of the medieval Hell is that he is a Renaissance poet. And the self-conscious function of the Renaissance poet was not only to teach,

⁴⁷Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York, 1938), P. 288.

but to delight: the two could not be separated. Milton inherited this principle from the classical age of Roman poetry; but this was not all he inherited. He believed that truth was not only knowable, but that the "ancients," though pagan, had through the use of reason alone embodied this truth in a culture that was based on a most noble conception of man and that could not be surpassed unless by the aid of Divine Revelation. He further believed that this culture had been enshrined in a literature, that, because it was so perfectly suited to the nature of man, should be the model for all future literatures. Thus he inherited a set of standards which included the forms that literature should take, the "style" that was suited to each form, and the principles that should govern the choice of material. This last, the choice of material, was based upon certain notions of refinement and decorum that could be ascertained from the example of the "ancients," particularly those of Classical Rome. Thus, Milton eschews the inclusion of the gross elements found in many medieval presentations of Hell, just as Virgil had created a milder Hades than his pagan predecessors. Yet this artistic choice was but a negative one. We must return to the delectare to appreciate the real subtlety of Milton's artistic success and to understand his concept of Hell as presented in Paradise Lost.

The arguments just presented---that Milton as a Puritan was not predetermined to a fire and brimstone Hell and that as a Renaissance poet he was bound by certain limits of refinement and decorum---obviously rest upon the judgment that Milton's Hell in Paradise Lost is not, as I have said, identical with the Christian cliché of Hell. It will be

necessary then to disagree with Dr. Johnson when he says that there is nothing new in Milton's description of Hell. Milton felt at least as keenly as Johnson that it was the Poet's obligation to cause surprise in the reader, and thus to generate emotion where there would have been none. Instruction without delight was a shrew, just as delight without instruction was a mistress. Dr. Johnson came to the wedding, but apparently did not stay to meet the bride. Perhaps the traditional ceremony, with its medieval echoes, put Dr. Johnson to sleep. He certainly missed the heart of Milton's Hell, a place which comes alive, in an artistic sense, because of the creation of Pandemonium and the concilia decorum that ensues there.

A. J. A. Waldock in his discussion of Milton's Hell has complained about the lack of suffering there. His judgment is that Milton's home of the Devils is not traditional. Dante's Hell is the "true type of hell."

The sinners symbolize their sin through all eternity, perpetually relive the past, or else stay fixed--grotesque mounted specimens--in horrible parody of their guilt. Without such fixity, literal or in effect, hell loses most of its meaning.⁴⁸

Such a judgment is true of Dante, the medieval Catholic, but not applicable to Milton the Renaissance Protestant. Waldock's a priori decision of what Hell should be leads him, as a critic, to a damaging pronouncement:

...Milton was trying his best to accomplish two incompatible things at the same time. He wanted to convey, as far as he could, the effect of a genuine hell; but he also wanted, still more, to make the drama in Hell intense. Hell therefore as a locality has to serve a double duty: it is a

⁴⁸Paradise Lost and Its Critics (Cambridge, 1962), p. 93.

place of perpetual and unceasing punishment, in theory; and it is also, in the practice of the poem, an assembly ground, a military area, a base for future operations. The two conceptions do not very well agree.⁴⁹

Waldock has isolated the major elements in Milton's Hell. It is certainly true that Milton created his Hell with a view toward the dramatic needs of the poem. Douglas Bush has explained quite clearly one of the problems facing Milton when he came to write his Christian epic:

Whatever Milton's scruples about the use of classic myth in Christian epics, he could not avoid drawing upon it, both tacitly and openly. One must remember Milton's peculiar difficulties. For Homer epic subject and epic material were one and indivisible. In the Aeneid they were not, an abstract philosophic theme was cast in an inadequate epic mold. For Milton the gap had widened immeasurably. His theme was still more abstract than Virgil's, and a biblical fable--Adam and Eve in the garden, God in heaven, Satan in hell--cut him off from traditional heroic stuff, from a traditional concrete background, except what had developed in modern treatments of the Fall. So in Paradise Lost the fighting is, next to the speeches of the Almighty, Milton's least successful achievement. As his own words show, he felt at least as keenly as we do the risk of dealing with spiritual and ethical ideas on the necessarily concrete plane of the heroic epic.⁵⁰

Milton's successful creative achievement, that of lifelike demons with a real and magnificent headquarters where they plot in dramatic (in both the technical and the common sense of the word) fashion the revenge they will have upon their Conqueror, forms the basis necessary for the epic struggle.

It has often been suggested that most modern readers of Paradise Lost remember, not the fire and brimstone of the opening description

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 94.

⁵⁰Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry (Minneapolis, 1932), p. 277.

of Hell, but Pandemonium and the concilia deorum; so also has Prof. Waldo reacted to Milton's Hell. What he has failed to appreciate is that perhaps Milton's Protestantism led him to envision a Hell different from the traditional, static one and that Milton, rather than being hampered by the dramatic needs of the poem, actually turned a seeming debit into an artistic success. The key, of course, to the fusion of these two diverse elements is the hell-within-oneself. But we shall come to this in due course.

Having seen that Milton had several diverse concepts of Hell available to him and remembering that the basic outline of his presentation, the Biblical fable, was simple, it will now be helpful to look at a possible source for Milton's Pandemonium and the relation of this source to the concilia deorum. It should be noted in passing that neither of these elements is new in the history of the Underworld. The concilia deorum appears often in the Classical tradition. And the idea of putting a building in Hell is found in the Celtic tradition, in the form of the síd, a marvelous underground palace, and in some Germanic presentations as a fortified castle. Further, Milton certainly knew Spenser's mention of the "house of endlesse paine" in his description of Hell in The Faerie Queen. The idea was not new, the artistic use certainly was.

III

Several years ago it was suggested that Milton drew upon his recollections of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome for his description

of Pandæmonium.⁵¹ Because of the present lack of knowledge about Milton's continental travels, such a suggestion must remain in the realm of conjecture, with its relative probability resting upon an accumulation of many kinds of evidence. The initial hint, of course, was impressionistic,⁵² followed by an attempt to substantiate the impression by certain historical and biographical facts; the format of this presentation will follow the same order. The final step will be to test the aptness of such a reading in light of what we have discovered about Milton's Hell.

St. Peter's was consecrated in 1636 by Urban VIII; Milton was in Rome in the Autumn of 1638. The Vatican, which is adjacent to the Basilica and connected by various cloisters, already comprised many buildings housing the Pope, the resident Cardinals, the Roman Curia and various other permanent administrative organs, and, more important for our purposes, the Vatican art gallery and library. We know from Milton's own testimony that he visited the library and was on friendly terms with one of the librarians, Lukas Holstein.⁵³ It is

⁵¹Rebecca W. Smith, "The Source of Milton's Pandæmonium," Modern Philology, XXIX (Aug., 1931 -- May, 1932), pp. 187-198. I am greatly indebted to Miss Smith's suggestive article; much of the material in this section is the result of following up leads found in her article, but I do not find that Miss Smith has really integrated what she has suggested into a more meaningful reading of the poem.

⁵²Many critics and editors have commented on the blind Milton's apparently remarkable visual memory, usually in reference to some pictorial image based upon an actual scene or art work witnessed years earlier; see particularly: A.W. Verity's edition, Paradise Lost, Books I and II (Cambridge, 1952), p. 80; Robert R. Cawley, Milton and the Literature of Travel (Princeton, 1951), p. 127; J.H. Hanford, John Milton, Englishman (New York, 1949), p. 97; M.E. Seaton, "Milton and the Myth of Isis," The Modern Language Review, XVII (1922), p. 168.

⁵³David Masson, The Life of John Milton (London, 1881), I, pp. 802-803.

but a few steps from there into the vast Basilica.

The topography around St. Peter's and Pandaemonium are similar:

There stood a Hill not far ...

Nigh on the Plain ...

(I, ll. 670 and 1. 700)

In Rome the hill is Vatican Hill, which is now within the boundaries of the small Vatican City State. The plain to the east leads to the heart of ancient Rome and is bisected by the Tiber. Immediately across the Tiber is the section of Rome called Trastevere where in ancient days the young Roman bucks used to race their chariots, not unlike the devils seeking amusement after the Council:

Part on the Plain, or in the Air sublime

Upon the wing, or in swift Race contend,

As at th' Olympian Games or Pythian fields;

Part curb thir fierie Steeds, or shun the Goal

With rapid wheels, or fronted Brigads form.

(II, ll. 528-32)

Milton's eye returns to Pandaemonium:

Anon out of the earth a Fabrick huge

Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound

Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet,

Built like a Temple, where Pilasters round

Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid

With Golden Architrave; nor did there want

Cornice or Freeze, with bossy Sculptures grav'n,

The Roof was fretted Gold....

(I, ll. 710-717)

These lines suggest the richness of the Baroque which in a frame less than immense (i.e., measureless) can give the impression of being "cluttered"; statues line the walls, overhang the arches leading to the alcoves, are set in the alcoves--everywhere the work of individual artists amazes the eyes and overwhelms one with the impression of artistic splendor.

Milton continues his description in a manner which creates the feeling of vastness which is the most striking note of his conception not only of Pandaemonium, but of all Hell.

Th' ascending pile
 Stood fixt her stately highth, and strait the dores
 Op'ning thir brazen foulds discover wide
 Within, her ample spaces, o're the smooth
 And level pavement: from the arched roof
 Pendant by suttile Magic many a row
 Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets fed
 With Naphtha and Asphaltus yielded light
 As from a sky.

(I, ll. 722-730)

On great festive occasions in St. Peter's a multitude of lamps hang so high above that they seem stars twinkling from out the vast canopy of dark and yet somehow diffuse light at the lower levels. Milton's star image creates a sense of vastness in Pandaemonium, just as the great constellation of lamps creates this feeling in St. Peter's.

On such an occasion the expectant eye is drawn past Bernini's breathtaking baldacchino toward the Papal chair and hangings set below the magnificent window of the "White Dove", the Holy Spirit. Milton gives two separate descriptions of Satan's throne, both of which resemble the magnificence of this splendid scene rising above the High Altar.

High on a Throne of Royal State, which far
 Outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
 Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
 Shows on her Kings Barbaric Pearl and Gold,
 Satan exalted sat, ...

(II, ll. 1-5)

Below the window of the Holy Spirit and resting above the High Altar stands the lavish Chair of St. Peter witnessed by the statues of four

early Popes. The window itself when seen from a distance in the late afternoon seems a gigantic pearl as the white figure of the Dove becomes blurred against its dark setting of glittering gold. As a preface to the second description we find Satan making his way unnoticed through the Devils as he

Ascended his high Throne, which under state
Of richest texture spread, at th' upper end
Was plac't in regal lustre.

(X, 11, 445-447)

The total visual conception of the grand scene rising above the altar could not better be suggested. The innumerable angels of all sizes and in every state of activity, the delicate rays of gold that extend from and set off the Dove Window, the billowing clouds upon which they ride, the flowing robes of the four human figures--all these gigantic details hold the eye in amazement that such lightness could be achieved in gold and bronze.

Then the expectancy mentioned earlier gives way to a burst of joy often audible, as the trumpets sound the approach of the Pope. Non-Catholics have been aghast to find themselves shouting with the throng of believers as the echoes resounded from the great ceiling. Such an occurrence in a cathedral is rather unusual; not so seemingly out of place is the following reaction of the devils:

Then of thir Session ended they bid cry
With Trumpets regal sound the great result:
Toward the four winds four speedy Cherubim
Put to thir mouths the sounding Alchymie
By Haralds voice explain'd: the hollow Abyss
Heard farr and wide, and all the host of Hell
With deafning shout, return'd them loud acclaim.
(II. 11. 514-520)

Yet with all these parallels I return to the vastness of St. Peter's and the vastness conveyed by Milton's lines. This feeling,

this spirit of the place is the convincing element in terms of the pictorial similarities between St. Peter's and Pandaemonium. One is momentarily disappointed upon entering the Basilica, for the perfect proportions confound the reason; the eye wanders for some point of reference, some means of comparison. Perhaps one has noticed a tiny cherub hovering above a holy water font but closer inspection reveals that the figure is over six feet tall. Or perhaps one notices the markings on the floor which indicate where all of the great cathedrals of the world would fit if placed up against the front wall. Sancta Sophia fills a little more than half; Westminster Abbey but a bit more. Then one begins to realize that the eye knows size only by comparison, that the mind has momentarily misjudged. As St. Peter's seems to swell before the eyes, man seems to shrink, for he has become the basis of comparison and he is insignificant. Milton shows an awareness of this phenomenon of the sense of sight, that is probably true in no other building as it is true in St. Peter's:

...they anon

With hundreds and with thousands trooping came
 Attended: all access was throng'd, the Gates
 And Porches wide, but chief the spacious Hall
 (Though like a cover'd field, where Champions bold
 Wont ride in arm'd, and at the Soldans chair
 Defi'd the best of Panin chivalry
 To mortal combat or carreer with Lance)
 Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
 Brusht with the hiss of rustling wings. As Bees
 In spring time, when the Sun with Taurus rides,
 Pour forth thir populous youth about the Hive
 In clusters; ...

...So thick the aerie crowd

Swarm'd and were straitn'd; till the Signal giv'n,
 Behold a wonder! they but now who seemd
 In bigness to surpass Earths Giant Sons
 Now less then smallest Dwarfs, in narrow room
 Throng numberless, like that Pigmean Race

Beyond the Indian Mount, or Faerie Elves, ...
 Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest forms
 Reduc'd thir shapes immense, and were at large,
 Though without number still amidst the Hall
 Of that infernal Court.

(I, ll. 759-771; 775-792)

By casting the bee image in the form of an epic simile, Milton achieves with wonderful economy a quite complex effect. The disparity between the form and the image ironically comments on the stature of the devils, whose labors on the construction of Pandaemonium have just been presented in such grand terms. Yet at the same time the image taken in its own terms completes the poet's picture of Pandaemonium and engenders in the reader a sense of the immensity of the palace. It is this note which Milton's artistic creation has in common with St. Peter's in Rome. And the realization of this similarity leads me to contend that Milton's remembrance of the Basilica provided the basis for his creation of Pandaemonium.

There is evidence that Milton's use of remembrances of St. Peter's may have been intentional. A survey of the possible sources of the bee simile will be helpful. Masson presents a possible one though he makes no application of the fact to Paradise Lost. A small biographical volume listing all the persons, native or foreign, residing in Rome through 1631 and 1632 who published anything during those two years or who had previously published anything, was undoubtedly still in circulation when Milton arrived in 1638. This volume was titled "Apes Romanae" ("Bees of Rome")⁵⁴ as a tribute to the Barberini. Masson outlines the importance of this family:

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 796.

Through the unusually long pontificate of Urban VIII (1623-1644) the aggregation of talent in Rome was probably as great as in any other pontificate of the seventeenth century. This pope, indeed, was not personally so active a Maecenas as some of his predecessors had been. He did rank along the dilettanti, having, as Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, written many Latin, Greek, and Italian poems, which, when published collectively in a superb folio volume at Paris in 1642, were to be accounted highly creditable to the head of Christendom.... Among his cardinals were three of his own relatives, of the Florentine house of Barberini,--his younger brother, Antonio Barberini, and his two nephews, Francesco Barberini and Antonio Barberini the younger, both sons of his elder brother, Carlo. The three had been cardinals since the first year of his pontificate; since which time also Carlo Barberini and another of his sons, Don Taddeo, had held the highest secular offices in the gift of the papacy. Such was the accumulation of rich posts and principalities among these members of the Pope's family that, even after the precedents of former pontificates, Urban's nepotism seemed outrageous. Rome all but belonged to the Barberini, whose family symbol of the bees met the eye on all the public buildings, and on their carriages in the public drives. Urban's care of his relatives, however, did not prevent him from being generous and friendly to others. Moreover, the Barberini were unexceptionably respectable in their conduct, and most competent deputies for the Pope in the patronage of art and letters.⁵⁵

I have already mentioned Milton's friendship with Lukas Holstein; It is noteworthy that this librarian had as his protector Cardinal Francesco Barberini, and that through Holstein Milton met the Cardinal. It seems probable that Milton through these connections met a good many of "the bees" listed in the above volume. Whether or not he recalled the "Bees of Rome" when he used this important image in Paradise Lost remains a matter of conjecture.

It is more certain that Milton knew the famous 'apian' passages in the Aeneid and the Georgics. And Miss Smith in her "The Source of Milton's Pandemonium" notes another possible source:

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 794-795.

In addition to this classical precedent, however, the simile of the beehive had another connotation for the seventeenth-century mind. For at least a hundred years a figure of speech which likened the Roman Catholic church to a beehive had been familiar in the religious controversial literature of Europe, and had been used by both Protestants and Catholics. Milton must have known by the title if nothing more, such books as the Bee hive of the Romishe Church and Babel's Balm. We should be warranted in conjecturing that these two connotations of the beehive simile--the classical and controversial--were associated in his mind even if we had no documentary evidence of the fact.⁵⁶

We leave the realm of conjecture, though, when we find Milton consciously using this image in a Roman Catholic frame of reference a comparison between papal supremacy and the government of bees in his attack on Salmasius:

In your Apparatus ad Primatum Papae you say that some divines of the Council of Trent made use of the example of the bees to prove the Pope's supremacy. ... "The bees," say you, "have a commonwealth, and so do natural philosophers call it; they have a king, but a harmless one; he is a leader rather than a despot; he beats not, pulls not, kills not his subject bees." No wonder therefore that they revere him so. Faith, 'twas under no lucky star of yours that you made contact with those Tridentine bees; three-toothed as they are, they show you up as a toothless drone.⁵⁷

That Milton had at least once made the conscious application of this metaphor to the government of the Catholic Church is certain; the reference to the Council of Trent is interesting. Many editors have noted ecclesiastical overtones in Milton's conception of the devils' Synod. Verity finds the "sarcastic purpose in applying the ecclesiastical word 'conclave' to the assembly of evil angels... unmistakable."⁵⁸ There are other scattered references which might

⁵⁶Rebecca Smith, op. cit., pp. 195-196.

⁵⁷Works (Columbia Edition), Vol. VII, p. 87.

⁵⁸A.W. Verity, op. cit., p. 100.

be interpreted as "sarcastic" or ironic or might even be drawn together to make a case for a satirical intent. We shall discuss presently what kind of a reading is suggested by the material under discussion, but for the present let us consider Milton's conception of a Church Council the dramatic context within which he could present the Devils attempting to work out their destiny. It has been suggested that Milton knew Phineas Fletcher's Latin poem Locustae vel Pietas Jesuitica.⁵⁹ If he did, the Protestant in him would probably have reacted to the satire, sarcasm and invective but the artist in him would certainly have reflected upon the lesson that a Council-scene without a dramatic context would fail poetically.

Before I outline what I mean by dramatic context, it might be useful to attempt briefly to reconstruct Milton's knowledge of, and attitude toward, the Council of Trent. Pope Paul III convened a universal Church Council at Trent in 1545. The choice of place was a concession to the Lutherans, that their Bishops might attend. The hope was that the healing of the German rupture might pave the way for the eventual return of all the separated brethren. That Milton ever had access to the actual proceedings at Trent seems unlikely; but that he was aware of the purposes of the Council can certainly be hypothesized. A brief review of In Quintum Novembris reveals that Milton most certainly had his own interpretation of the purpose of Trent; he was in fact but an imaginative leap away from what I consider to be the dramatic situation he created in the first

⁵⁹See James Holly Handford, A Milton Handbook (New York, 1961), p. 135; pp. 263-264.

two Books of Paradise Lost. The impetus to this leap--the fusion of the Pope and the Devil--was the recognition of the analogy between the problems that faced Trent and those which confronted Satan and his followers.

Certainly notable as a possible gloss on Paradise Lost are the two alternatives which Satan, in Milton's early Latin poem, propounds to the Pope; these alternatives are presented as methods to save the Papacy from its "foe." This "foe", although particularized in the poem to apply to England, calls to mind as its background and ultimate meaning the whole situation caused by the Protestant Reformation. Satan first tries to frighten the Pope out of his present state of apathy:

But, if you prefer to lie torpid, on your soft, luxurious couch, and refuse to beat to earth the growing might of your foe, he will fill the Tyrrhenian Sea with his numerous soldiery, and fix fast his gleaming standards on the Aventine Hill....⁶⁰

Then Satan proposes his plan:

And yet assail him not in wars and in open strife: vain is such toil: as master of guile make use of treachery....⁶¹

He then outlines what has become known in history as the Gunpowder Plot; the success of the plot is to be followed by quick and open war:

When they are sore-stricken by sudden panic and amazed at the catastrophe, let the merciless Gaul invade them, the savage Iberian.⁶²

⁶⁰"In Qui-tum Novembris," Works, Vol. I, Pt. 1, p. 245 (ll. 118-122).

⁶¹Ibid., p. 245 (ll. 125-127).

⁶²Ibid., p. 247 (ll. 139-141).

It is obvious that all of the essential elements that will come to comprise the issues in the debate in Pandaemonium are present in these two alternatives. I suggest that when Milton conceived the first two books of Paradise Lost as we now know them he had his own earlier poem in mind, or at least the convictions which prompted it. The realization of the analogy between the plight of the Devils and the plight of the Roman Church after the Reformation led him to the happy discovery of the dramatic possibilities of the Devils' synod conceived in the terms of a Church Council. He then refined the oversimplified alternatives presented by Satan in the earlier poem and invested different devils with the characteristics which would make plausible the various positions presented by their speeches in the Council. Thus, those of Belial and Mammon find as their common source the apathy of the Pope which the Satan of the Latin poem tried to frighten away. Moloch finds his simple position descendant from the one aspect of the original design of the earlier Satan, that which is to follow the surprise of treachery--open war. The speeches of Satan and Beelzebub spring essentially from the other positive alternative, with Satan merely being diplomatic enough to let his spokesman completely outline the plan; their position finds its roots in the plan of action which the Satan of In Quintum Novembris would sum up as "treachery."

The aim of Satan's proposals of In Quintum Novembris was to take revenge upon the enemies of the Catholic Church and to regain the Papal sway over these enemies. Thus, if my analysis of the relationship between this earlier poem and Paradise Lost is correct, the basic attitudes reflected in the Devils' speeches symbolize, for a

Protestant like Milton, the basic attitudes that motivated the delegates to the Council of Trent. Moloch, the "Scepter'd King" represents those who advocated war to bring back the Protestants; Belial stands for those who accepted the Reformation and were content with the status quo, perhaps those who out of apathy held up the start of the Council for twenty years; Mammon perhaps stands for the humanists inside the Church, those who are content to better their real situation by distractions; Beelzebub, prompted by Satan, stands for revenge.

In brief then, the young Milton attempted to analyze the attitudes of the Church of Rome toward the Protestant Reformation and made use of his conclusions in his Latin poem; when he came to write Paradise Lost he returned to consider these attitudes which now became the germ of the pattern which he applies to the analogous situation facing the Devils. The end result is a dramatic situation that finds little precedent in the Bible or in the other sources with which he was familiar.

James Holly Manford has suggested a possible explanation of the creative process which presented to Milton's critical faculty the various elements which were ultimately to become so essential to his conception of Books I and II:

Imperial Rome in beauty and decay left on his imagination
an impression in which ancient studies, the emotions of
the hour, and the observed actuality are curiously mingled.⁶³

When Milton called up in his memory the classical material necessary to the epic, he found along with it remembrances of actual places. He

⁶³ John Milton, Englishman, p. 84.

chose one of these, St. Peter's Basilica, as the pictorial prototype for his Pandaemonium. Other remembrances of Rome, of current history, of Roman Catholic government congealed around the nucleus of his earlier In Quintum Novembris, and formed an organizational pattern which allowed for a poetic presentation of the plight of the Devils and its resolution, a presentation that grew naturally out of its setting. Within this pattern Milton created a composite picture of place and dramatic action that was capable of conveying his complex attitude to the essence of the situation. The emotional energy generated by the sheer beauty and awesomeness of Pandaemonium carries the reader beyond the dangerous realization (in terms of the necessities of the heroic epic) of the preposterous plight of the devils and their attempts to extricate themselves from this plight.

IV

In summary then, we have seen that there has always been some tradition about the Otherworld which has formed the minds of men; further, we have seen that some or perhaps many of the various elements seem to transcend temporal, cultural and geographical limitations and are found in all of the traditions. We have also noted that the medieval tradition was still exerting an influence on Milton's contemporaries. This tradition was not only a composite itself, but, in the case of our poet, would certainly have been modified by his extensive reading which presented to him materials from the other traditions. It seems at least tenable that Milton's early concept of Hell was largely medieval; it is certain that medieval elements form the backdrop of his presentation

in Paradise Lost: the vast, dark and wasted land; the fiery lake; the flames, fed by the ever-unconsumed sulphur, that burn fiercely but give no light; the alternating torments of heat and cold.

Yet, Milton would not have been satisfied with a purely medieval presentation: first, his Puritanism would have led him away from the vulgar negativism of the medieval torture-chamber; secondly, his commitment to the Renaissance concept of the poet-seer would seem to have demanded that he create a Hell that would re-vivify the meaning of God's place of punishment. This a priori evidence is partially established when we find Milton rejecting the gross elements of the medieval concept and more positively when we note that an ordinary reaction to Milton's Hell, echoed in the judgments of many critics, is to be impressed by Pandaemonium and the debate of the devils rather than to remember the fire and brimstone.

The construction of Pandaemonium and the spectacle of the concilia decorum, because they give artistic life to Milton's Hell, are focal elements in the creation; it now becomes necessary to see what kind of a reading of the poem results from the suggestion that St. Peter's and a Church Council are respective sources for these two elements. To begin with, it is not my purpose to suggest that Milton's readers would necessarily have recognized the Catholic source of Pandaemonium or the analogue in the Council scene. As in the case of so many of the allusions in the poem, these two aspects work on more than one level. The more obvious parallel in the case of the Council is to the English Parliament. To react to this parallel is to appreciate the already trenchant irony of the devils trying to legislate away, as it were, the results of their fall. To react to the Catholic

analogue, however, is to appreciate a deeper meaning, one that reinforces a tone of sinister machinations concerning the work of the devils, for the reader then realizes that the devils' plot was not only initially successful, but that they continue to operate in the world even to the point of perverting Christianity itself. And in fact, for the seventeenth century Protestant, there was a world-wide organization committed to the work of the devil and operating under the name of "Catholic," an organization whose headquarters could be symbolized by St. Peter's and whose government, though retaining the trappings of freedom in such things as universal Church Councils, was in reality ruled by a despot.

But there is a third and more basic level on which Milton's Hell works, and works without in any way destroying the force of the two analogues, for, in fact, their force rests upon it. The element common to both of the above analogues, the loss of personal freedom to a greater force, points to the real heart of Milton's presentation -- his Hell is institutionalized. It is obvious enough that the devils who revolted against the supposed tyranny of God, have in doing so subjected themselves to a real tyranny. In an age which was intellectually and emotionally committed to the Great Chain of Being, the subjection of one's will to a peer, to one whose nature was essentially equal, was tyranny. God by His nature had a right to impose His will upon the angels or to delegate such power, just as man had the right to impose his will on the animal kingdom; Satan had no such right. To yield to the will of a rightful ruler was meritorious; but Satan was no longer such, having abdicated his place by his revolt against his own rightful Ruler. The real subtlety of Milton's creation of

his Hell is the extent to which this place establishes and supports the poet's concept of what the devils have done and the punishment they have brought upon themselves.

The sin of the devils was a sin of Pride, the choice of their own will in the rejection of their Maker's. But even in the moment of their sin they were deluded or deluding themselves, for it was not their will but that of the renegade's that they were following.

Abdiel was the only one who was "faithful" -- faithful to his nature making a free choice to follow his Creator. Milton points this out at length:

Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
 Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
 Unshak'n, uneduc'd, untterrifi'd
 His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, his Zeale;
 Nor number, nor example with him wrought
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
 Though single.

(V, ll. 897-903)

This is the phenomenon of the mass-mind. The ironic paradox of their sin is that having chosen their own wills they have condemned themselves to a life totally devoid of the possibility of real choice. For all eternity they must continually pervert their own natures.

From the moment we first see the devils in action in their new abode, we realize the nature of their sin and its punishment. The epic catalogue is grand, but the action is much less so: "All these and more came flocking..." -- the participle is intentionally chosen and Biblically ironic. Satan's army then forms its ranks:

Thus they
 Breathing united force with fixed thought
 Mov'd on in silence to soft Pipes that charm'd
 Thir painful steps o're the burnt soyle; and now
 Advanc't in view, they stand, a horrid Front
 Of dreadful length and dazzling Arms, in guise
 Of Warriors old with order'd Spear and Shield,
 Awaiting what command thir mighty Chief
 Had to impose...

(I, ll. 559-567)

This is more a modern army, certainly not the army of the heroic age where each man (the gods and great heroes after whom the devils are named) is capable of individual combat; the devils are but "in guise / Of Warriors old."

If there were any doubt about the devils' loss of their individual wills, the manipulation at the Council, for all its show of democracy, would end this illusion. It is Satan who rules Hell. And in establishing this, Milton has satisfied the dramatic needs of the heroic epic. He has created a character who, in a sense because he rules Hell, seems to transcend it. The poet ran a risk here (and one that later criticism bears out), but Satan had to be of epic stature, at least until after the Fall of Adam and Eve. Until then, only an occasional epic simile or an authorial reminder of God's permissive Will hinted that Satan was perpetually doomed to the Hell of his fellow devils.

The concrete aspects of Hell further enhance the mood of institutionalization; even the material objects there seem to control the devils. Pandaemonium, even while the devils are building it, seems to be escaping from their control -- "a Fabric huge / Rose like an Exhalation..." This impression is strengthened when, after Pandaemonium is completed and the devils in martial splendor come to enter, the grand tone is suddenly relaxed by means of the "bee-image" we have already investigated. Pandaemonium, their palace, now becomes their prison; its mammoth proportions and magnificent beauty stands against their dwarfed size achieved in a "pretty" image. Again, the splendor of the building and that of the regal scene to follow reflects, not upon the individual devils, but upon the Despot.

To return for a moment to the Catholic analogue -- the parallel between the construction of Pandemonium and that of the great medieval and Renaissance cathedrals was probably in Milton's mind. As a poet he certainly appreciated the beauty of such buildings, but as a Puritan lover of freedom he was probably appalled at the thought of the untold and unknown labor of the many for the worldly glory of the few. Seen in this light, St. Peter's could readily become a complex symbol of the gains and the losses of an institutionalized Church. That such was Milton's feelings toward the Church of Rome is amply documented in his polemical writings. Yet even here the image is universalized to all tyrants by the mention of "Babel" and the "Memphian Kings."

As we have seen, the medieval Hell had tended more and more toward an individuality of punishment; in Dante this tendency reached its climax. Milton rejects the individuality of punishment, while accepting the Dantesque fitting of the punishment to the crime. Pride is the root of every sin: all sinners then are basically the same and in Milton's Hell receive the same punishment. There is something at least negatively personal about receiving one's own special kind of punishment, but Milton deprives the sinner even of this. In the Classical Underworld, the great sinners are allowed a gigantic task to perform, and, in that sense, an ennobling punishment. The paradox of the punishment in Milton's Hell is that while the sinner retains his interior individuality, his ability to reflect upon his plight, he cannot externalize his essential longing for completion in act, not even in the negative terms of an acceptance of a great suffering. Seen in this light even the medieval aspects, the fire and brimstone, become galling in a new and ironic sense,

for the devils are deprived even of the masochistic pleasure of sustaining a common, but eternal, punishment, a punishment made heroic by its duration. The devils are allowed quasi-Elysian comforts and incomplete distractions: such leisure eventually only forces them back upon themselves to contemplate their folly and their loss.

Such is Milton's Hell, artistically eclectic, yet unified; perhaps creatively the result of the realization of the parallel between the work of the Roman Church and that of the devils, but certainly a new Hell in the history of that place, a Hell that transcends any analogue or source, a Hell full of subtle surprises to awaken the reader to a new prospect of his possible plight. There, deprived of the distracting comfort of external punishment, left the time for reflection, there unable to enjoy the beauty of Pandæmonium and the Elysian environment, there for all eternity given the time to attempt to make a home, yet knowing that the attempt is vain -- what place could be more frightening to a Christian who spends his life seeking perfection and, though thwarted in this life, hopes to find it in the next?

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MILTON'S CONCEPT OF HELL

by

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Paradise Lost is a Christian epic which has as its subject the Fall of Man. The major creative problem involved in Milton's choice of this subject matter and this form was that he had to deal with spiritual and ethical ideas on the necessarily concrete plane of the epic. Cut off from traditional heroic stuff, from a traditional heroic background, Milton nevertheless had to present a struggle which, at least on certain levels, was epic. For such a struggle to be believable, the Satan of the poem had to be of epic proportions. Milton therefore presents the greatest of the devils as the tyrant in a kingdom which comes before the reader in very concrete terms; Milton's Hell is a vast land dominated by a magnificent palace where heroes of great stature meet to plan their strategy and decide upon a course of revenge against God. The dramatic needs of the poem demanded the creation of such a Hell. The Bible presented no such material; Milton had to look elsewhere.

The minds of men seem always to have been formed by some notion of an Afterlife. Though many of the legends of the Otherworld are of great antiquity and though the roots of many of the elements found in these various presentations seem to reach back beyond any written records, still it is possible to establish the existence of four distinct traditions of the Otherworld which may be classified as Classical, Eastern, Christian and Celtic. A comparison of Milton's concept of Hell, as determined from his presentation of it in Paradise Lost, with the Hells of each of these traditions demonstrates that he

certainly knew three of the traditions directly through one or more representative and the fourth, the Eastern, at least indirectly. Further, such a comparison shows that Milton was eclectic in his choice of details and images for his Hell in Paradise Lost; but more significantly it shows that he created a Hell essentially different from those of his predecessors, a Hell based upon a philosophical and theological transformation of Christianity.

Despite the great cultural, political and even the religious changes, the medieval tradition of Hell was still exerting an influence on Milton's contemporaries. In fact, it seems probable that Milton's early concept of Hell was largely medieval; it is certain that medieval elements form the backdrop of his presentation in Paradise Lost. Yet, Milton was not satisfied with a purely medieval presentation: first, his Puritanism led him away from the vulgar negativism of the medieval torture-chamber; secondly, his commitment to the Renaissance concept of the poet-seer demanded that he create a Hell that would re-vivify the meaning of God's place of punishment. The medieval Hell had been tending more and more toward an individuality of punishment; in Dante this tendency reached its climax. Milton rejected the individuality of punishment, while accepting the Dantesque fitting of the punishment to the crime. Pride is the root of every sin; all sinners then are basically the same and in Milton's Hell receive the same punishment. The ironic paradox of the sin of the devils is that, having rejected the will of their Maker in the name of freedom, they have condemned themselves to an existence totally devoid of the possibility of a real choice, of a meaningful act of the will--they have enlisted in the army of that tyrant, Satan. This is the essence of Milton's Hell: for all

eternity the sinner must continually pervert his own nature and this with full knowledge of what he was and what he has now become.

This reading of Milton's presentation of Hell makes more meaningful the Catholic analogues sometimes noted for Pandæmonium--St. Peter's in Rome--and the concilia deorum--a Church Council. To react to these analogues is to appreciate a deeper meaning in the revenge of the devils, for the reader then realizes that the devils were not only successful in their initial plot, but that they continue to operate in the world even to the point of perverting Christianity.